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ABSTRACT

The dual system of vocational training is a joint government-industry program and part of the general educational system in Germany. It provides hands-on training in private businesses coupled with specialized instruction in public vocational schools at no cost to students. The objective of the dual system is to provide young people with the best possible job qualifications by engaging the private sector, which provides practical experience, and the public vocational schools, which provide theoretical instruction, in the training of the future work force. The program bridges the transition from school to work. More than two-thirds of all German youths between the ages of 15 and 18 enroll in vocational training in one of the 440 officially recognized occupations. Most teenagers begin their vocational training after at least 9 years of full-time mandatory education, but there are no special admission requirements for participating in the dual system. The individual graduate is responsible for finding an apprentice position with an employer. The training, which lasts 2-3 years depending on the occupation, is designed and administered jointly by the company, professional groups, and the vocational school. All three sectors shoulder the cost jointly. Although no firms are required to offer vocational training, most participate because they consider it economically beneficial in the long run. Students spend the majority of their time in their on-the-job training and 1 or 2 days per week in a part-time, classical vocational school. Although the dual system has been working well for Germany, it is not immediately obvious that the system might be easily transferable to other countries. The German culture emphasizes preparing students for the workplace, the relatively high homogeneity of the German student population allows for more standardization, and the long tradition of business supports the concept. Elements of the German dual system have been adopted successfully in other countries, such as India, Peru, and Brazil. (KC)

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The Dual System of Vocational Training in Germany

by Dagmar Kraemer

Several countries have sought ways of improving the employment potential of young citizens and some have been looking for models from abroad. This article describes the German system of vocational training that has helped to create and maintain a highly qualified work force in Germany that has minimized youth unemployment. Readers will draw their own conclusions as to its applicability in the United States.

What is it?

The dual system of vocational training is a joint government-industry program and part of the general educational system in Germany. It provides hands-on training in private businesses and firms coupled with specialized instruction in public vocational schools. Because few jobs are available to unskilled workers in Germany, the completion of vocational training is indispensable for emloyment in the artisanal trades, industries, and commerce for those young people who do not pursue a degree in higher education. The instructional part of the program is offered at no cost in every county and city.

What is its Objective?

The objective of the dual system is to provide young people with the best possible job qualifications by engaging the private sector, which provides practical experience, and the public vocational schools, which provide theoretical instruction, in the training of the future work force.

Who Participates?

The program, designed for young people, bridges the transition from school to work. More than two-thirds of all German youths between fifteen and eighteen years of age enroll in vocational training in one of the 440 officially recognized occupations, from baker or bank clerk to welder or zoo helper. Most teenagers begin their vocational training after at least nine

years of full-time mandatory education, but there are no special admission requirements for participating in the dual system. During the last years of schooling, public career counselors, teachers, and social workers advise students about career opportunities. In addition, students are encouraged to participate in a four-week internship at a company or shop of their choice.

Although career counselors facilitate and assist in the procurement of training places, it is up to the individual graduate to find an apprentice (Lehrling) position with an employer. After the student has chosen a vocation and identified a qualified firm, a training contract with the firm is drawn up outlining the commitments and responsibilities of both parties and describing the stages of the training period. For the entire duration of this period, the employer pays the trainee a fixed salary and provides paid leave for the time spent in school.

The training, which lasts from two to three years depending on the occupation, is designed and administered jointly by the company, professional groups, and the vocational school. Not every company, however, is entitled to engage in vocational training. To be admitted as a training firm, a company must meet a number of criteria; it must, for example, be able to provide technically and pedagogically qualified instructors and the necessary equipment (as stated in government training directives).

Small businesses that cannot offer the entire range of vocational training according to government regulations can supplement incompany training by enrolling trainees in group training centers financed by the professional organizations, business federations, and other professional institutions. Prior to unification, there had been more apprenticeship positions than applicants available in the Federal Republic of Germany. As investment in the new federal states grows over the next few years, however, this relation should be reversed.

Where does it come from?

Although vocational training in Germany derives its rationale from modern technology's demand for a corps of skilled workers (even for entry-level technical jobs), it has its roots in the medieval German guilds. The guilds consisted of artisans and craftsworkers, and their members determined the number of apprentices, journeymen, and masters affiliated with each guild. In these guilds, the apprentice-journeyman-master was the model.

This system continued into the Industrial Revolution - in the nineteenth century the factories embraced the model which was carried over to this day. The other part of the dual system, the vocational school, originated in the religious and artisan Sunday schools of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the professional schools of continuing education established in the nineteenth century. The dual system was incorporated into the Industrial Code of 1869 when manufacturers were legally obliged to send their trainees to schools of further education.

Today, the majority of vocational training takes place in industry, commerce, and the trades.

Who Pays for it?

All three parties to the contract shoulder the cost jointly: the state provides occupation-specific instruction free of charge; business and industry provide their most skilled workers as instructors, and machines and equipment for training purposes; and the apprentice accepts a monthly salary of about $ 650 (depending on the year of training and the occupation) - a fraction of an unskilled worker's income, and a figure below the unemployment benefit rate.

No firm is required, however, to offer vocational training. The main reason for the continued support of the dual system by the three parties lies in the perceived long-term benefit. Vocational training is considered economically profitable in the long run - not only because it ensures a skilled work force, but also because it creates greater mobility and a predictable labor market due to uniform, nationwide, vocational qualification standards. Germans believe that with increasing specialization and the internationalization of trade, the fortune of their national economy depends, to a large extent, on these highly skilled front-line workers.

How does it work?

Due to the wide range of occupations participating in the dual system, students are provided with a variety of options through which to pursue on-the-job training and earn a modest salary. "Learning by doing" is the prime motif behind the dual system. Trainees therefore spend the majority of their time at work where they are confronted with increasingly complex tasks under the supervision of company instructors. The jobs they are expected to learn in the course of their apprenticeship are clearly laid out in accordance with a standardized training program.

Typically, an apprentice spends one or two days per week in a part-time, classical vocational school, but is paid year-round without salary reduction. Alternatively, classroom instruction can be concentrated in the form of block sessions extending over several weeks. Schools are organized around five main vocational paths: business, industry, home economics, agriculture, and mixed qualifications. In these vocational schools, apprentices not only learn about the theoretical aspects of their occupation, but also become familiar with the broader aspects of the trade and issues not addressed during practical training. Although classroom instruction revolves around the selected occupation, roughly 40 percent of the syllabus includes general education in the arts and sciences, mathematics, social studies, and economics.

At the end of their apprenticeship, the trainees take both a theoretical and a practical examination that are administered jointly by representatives from the employers' and employees' associations, and the staff of the vocational schools. All examination requirements are standardized in the government-approved training code. Having passed the examinations, the apprentice becomes either a journeyman (Geselle), a specialized clerk or salaried employee (Fachangestellter), or a skilled worker (Facharbeiter).

Does this System work in other Countries?

Although the dual system has been working well for Germany, it is not immediately obvious that the system might be easily transferable to other countries. In Germany, vocational training is part of a public education system that emphasizes preparing its students for the requirements of the workplace. The relatively high homogeneity of the German student population allows for more homogeneous laws, a higher level of standardization, and codual system, firms work closely with government agencies in developing the training code and specifying examination requirements. This type of close cooperation between the public and private sectors is considered normal in Germany and their relationship is generally not adversarial. Germans have a relatively high tolerance for government regulations. Also, the close cooperation between competing firms in securing their supply of a skilled labor force is considered beneficial and not in violation of antitrust laws.

Elements of the German dual system have been adopted successfully in countries such as India, Peru, and Brazil. In 1992, the EC Commission declared vocational training one of its "priorities in launching a new and indispensable effort to invest in people, in order to develop

their skills, their creativity and their versatility." In 1987, the EC adopted the "Programme for Education and Training of Adult Citizens in EC Member States," designed to provide young adults in every member state with the opportunity of following a course of vocational training for at least one year at home or in any other member state.

(IN-Press)